

THE EFFECTS OF FAMILY TYPE UPON SELF-ESTEEM IN ADOLESCENT MALES

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THE EFFECTS OF STEPFATHERS UPON SELF-ESTEEM IN ADOLESCENT MALES

by

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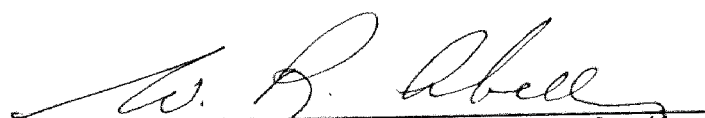
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An abstract of a Thesis by
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The problem. This study examined the effects of family type upon self-esteem in adolescent males. In addition, the study examined male adolescents' activities, time spent with friends, parental punishment and how long these adolescents have been living in a stepfamily or mother-only family.

Procedure. The sample consisted of 121 male adolescents from intact families, 37 male adolescents from stepfather families and 59 male adolescents in mother-only families. Two instruments were used: (a) the Piers-Harris Self-Concept Test; (b) a general questionnaire consisting of 45 questions concerning activities, time spent at home, kinds of punishment and who they were presently living with.

Findings. An analysis of variance on the data obtained from the Piers-Harris Self-Concept Test indicated that there were no significant differences in self-esteem of early adolescent males as a function of family type. There was a developmental difference on three of the subscales of the Piers-Harris Self-Concept Scale. Results of the activity questionnaire revealed younger males spending more time at home with mother, and older adolescents reported spending more time with friends. The 13- and 14-year olds reported mother punishing more frequently than the 11- and 12-year olds. Significant family type differences were found between the father-absent (mother-only) family and other family types in that adolescents in father-absent families reported more involvement in school extra-curricular activities and youth clubs. The other family type difference was adolescents of stepfather families reporting less frequently that best friends had met their mothers.

Conclusion. The results of this study provide us with a somewhat more positive picture than previous studies on the problems in adolescent males due to family type.

Recommendations. Stepfamilies, father-absent families and intact families should be extensively studied to detect differences in family types. Also, specific age groups of family types should be investigated to find if differences are found in the age group or family.

CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

Stepfamilies with one or more divorced parents are society's new family unit. In early American history, parental replacement was due largely to a prevailing high mortality rate (Griffith, 1980). However, since 1920, parental replacement is the result of a steadily increasing divorce rate. As the incidence of remarriage following divorce remains high, there is an increasing need to examine the unique characteristics of the remarriage family. As Furstenberg and Spanier (1984) remarked:

"The high rates of mortality meant that marriages were replaced rather than rearranged: Parents were removed rather than appended. While it is useful to recognize that high rates of family dissolution and reconstitution are not unprecedented, the parallels with the past can be misleading. Patterns of remarriage after divorce represent recent institutional innovations rather than historical continuities." (Furstenberg & Spanier, 1984 p 35).

A stepfamily is born of loss. A stepfamily is formed because of the dissolution of the nuclear couple unit, either by death or divorce. It is the remarriage of a biological parent that results in the stepfamily. A second major loss for all of the family members is the loss or change of the original family relationship, with its traditional norms and clear expectations. The stepfamily, when it is formed, moves into largely uncharted territory. There are no clearly set rules, roles or expectations for step relationships (Einstein, 1985). There are an estimated 10 million children under 18 living with a biological parent and stepparent or with two parents who were remarried, representing about one-sixth of all children under 18 years of age (Cherline & McCarthy, 1983). Prosen and Farmer (1982) reported that every year one-half million adults become stepparents. They further project that by

1990 the stepfamily could well be the norm. Two recent studies that included children of divorce and separation indicate that the proportion of children who will experience parental divorce in their lives will be at least two in five (Furstenberg, et. al., 1983; Bumpass, 1983). Over half of these children will see the parent with whom they live marry. Thus, about one child in four will grow up having more than two parents (Furstenberg & Spanier, 1984).

Among the families of remarried mothers an estimated 70% of the children are living with their biological mother and a stepfather (Glick & Norton, 1977). There have been relatively few studies concerning the role of the stepfather in reconstituted families. Because of the growing number of stepfamilies, there is a need to further explore the ramifications of the step-relationship.

The main purpose of this thesis was to examine the effects of the stepfathers upon the development of self-esteem in adolescent males. I have chosen the stepfather because the most common stepfamily is the mother, her children, and a stepfather (Glick & Norton, 1977). Adolescent males were chosen for this study for two reasons. The first reason is to study the developmental stage of adolescence and secondly, considerable research has shown that males tend to be more vulnerable to effects of divorce than females (Hetherington & Cox, 1982). The developmental tasks of the adolescent male are both exaggerated and blurred by divorce. It is during the teens when a child begins to act and think as an adult. Adolescent boys with no male figure to hold them in line or show them self control may test their masculine aggression

beyond normal age-appropriate mischief. Others become loners cutting themselves off from their families (Hetherington, 1981). Approximately nine in ten children live with the mother following the divorce (Glick, 1979). Such statistics indicate it is boys who most often lack same-sex role models in the crucial years of adolescence (Hetherington & Cox, 1982).

Furthermore, some authors have argued that stepfamily relationships are most difficult when adolescents, rather than children, are involved. Smith (1953) stated that the most difficult time for a child to adjust to remarriage was during adolescence. Smith concluded from interview data on parents and stepparents that the younger the child is the more apt he is to be trustful and accepting than the older child, who must sever bonds of loyalty to the absent parent (Smith, 1953). Thomson (1966) refers to adolescence as an obstacle course for stepfamilies, and he cites the unevenness of their behavior as why adults find adolescents so wearing. The unpredictability of teenagers requires flexibility on the part of parents. Though most of the literature states that it is harder for adolescents to adjust to stepparents, there is no indication that it is that age group which most needs a parent of the same sex (Blaine, 1963). Duberman's (1973) conclusion, based on interviews with stepparents, was the older the child, the more difficult the relationship between the stepchild and stepmother. He found that age was not a factor in the stepfather's relationship with his stepchild. However, it was a factor for stepmothers. Seventy-five percent of the children under 13 and 47 percent of those 13 and over were reported as having "excellent" relationships with their stepmothers.

Lutz (1983) in a recent study reported what adolescents believed to be the stressful and non-stressful aspects of stepfamily living. Her sample consisted of 103 adolescents between the ages of 12 and 18. These teenagers reported that issues pertaining to divided loyalty and discipline were perceived to be the most stressful aspects of stepfamily living.

The primary dependent measure in this study is self-esteem. Self-esteem is the portion of the self-concept which concerns the evaluations and appraisals we make of ourselves. A person may be described as having positive or negative self-esteem, an accepting or critical orientation toward the self. The cognitive growth that takes place during adolescence ought to bring observable changes in the person's understanding of the self just as it brings changes in the understanding of other complex physical and social systems (Inhelder & Piaget, 1958, Okun & Saspy, 1977).

A variety of methods have been used to evaluate developmental changes in the self-concept during adolescence. The interpretation of research on the self-concept is made somewhat difficult because of the variety of definitions of the self that are implied in each method of measuring self-concept. The following studies suggest some of the dimensions along which the self-esteem portion of self-concept is being revised during adolescence. Wylie's (1979) major review of self-esteem research suggested that there are no age differences in self-esteem in childhood but that self-esteem becomes more positive during adolescence. However, Rosenberg (1979), using the Coopersmith Self-Concept Test,

found a dramatic decline in self-esteem at 12 years of age in a predominantly black and working class sample. Parish and Taylor (1979) asked students to respond to the Personal Attribute Inventory for Children (Parish & Taylor, 1978) and found that children from stepfamilies demonstrated more positive self-concepts than those from divorced families.

Stepfamilies

The existing research on stepfamilies and adolescents has contradictory findings. The findings in Bowerman and Irish (1962) stem from two separate, though related, studies. Data for the first study was collected in the State of Washington in 1953, and for the second study in North Carolina and Ohio in 1960. Questionnaires were administered by classroom teachers to junior and senior high school students. The analysis was conducted on the data provided by the 2,145 stepchildren found among the almost 29,000 teenagers who were involved in the two studies.

Their conclusion was that the cultural ideal--that of the stepparent being like a real parent to the stepchild--was not often achieved. These authors asked adolescents of stepparent families to rate their relations with their stepmother or stepfather and their natural parent; and then they compared these ratings with the same parental ratings of children in natural parent homes. Their findings were that in all aspects homes involving step-relationships proved more likely to have stress, ambivalence, and low cohesiveness than natural parent homes. Bowerman and Irish further indicated that stepmothers had

a more difficult role than stepfathers did and the affectional levels towards stepmothers were lowest. They suggested that society is more likely to give assistance to the male stepparent and that males are more likely to find social acceptance in the stepfather role, but provided no evidence to support this contention.

Fast and Cain (1966) found that stepfamilies cannot be patterned after our traditional nuclear family. They contended that regardless of the stepparent's willingness and ability, success is not likely because our social norms about the family, with the idea that a family includes a mother and father, but not stepfather or stepmother. They explained one of the reasons for inevitable failure is that the new stepparent is in addition to, instead of a replacement for, the previous parent. In other words, the previous parent is still very much in the family picture. This in itself will make it difficult for the stepparent to function in the family. One example could be discipline, and the frequently heard retort when a stepparent lays down the law, "You're not my father!", "You're not my mother!", again reminding the stepparent that the natural parent is still a part of the family. Fast and Cain also agreed with Bowerman and Irish that for the stepparent to enact the role of nonparent is socially disapproved.

On the other hand, Duberman (1973) found that 64% of her stepparent population rated their relations with their stepchildren as excellent. Duberman studied aspects of step-relationships among 88 stepfamilies in the Cleveland area. A random sample of parents who remarried during the years of 1965-68, was drawn from the marriage bureau

of Cuyahoga County, in the Cleveland, Ohio area. Included in the evaluation of this study were the opinions of both the stepparents and the natural parent as to the quality of the relationships. Parent-Child Relationship Scores (PCRS) for each family were obtained in the following way. Each husband and wife were asked to rate his/her relationship with each stepchild. Each spouse was also asked to evaluate each of his/her own children's relationship with the stepparent. These two ratings produced an index of self-rated step-relations.

It is worthy to note the time difference between Bowerman and Irish (1962) and Duberman (1973) studies. In the Bowerman and Irish study, the data was collected in 1953 and 1960; as compared to Duberman's study in 1973. As we can see, there is a thirteen year and twenty-two year span between these two studies. This could possibly explain the difference between these two studies if changes in the social acceptance of divorce and the stepfamily occurred between 1953 and 1973. Also, there was a subject difference; Bowerman and Irish (1962) asked adolescents to rate their relations with their stepparents and parents. Duberman asked parents to rate their relationship with the children.

Wilson and his colleagues (Wilson, Zurcher, McAdams, & Curtis, 1975) focused on the long-term effects of stepfather families on stepchildren. An analysis of questionnaire data from the 1973 National Opinion Research Center General Social Survey (NORC) and the 1973 University of Michigan Youth in Transition Survey (YIT) was undertaken to test the null hypothesis that there were no differences between adult respondents who had experienced stepfather families and respondents who

had experienced natural parent families in selected social and psychological characteristics.

The respondents in the NORC survey were asked to consider items relating to their family background and other past experiences in a time frame when they were approximately 16 years of age. The YIT study employed a longitudinal four stage design, covering a period of five years. The YIT sample differs from the NORC sample in two important ways. First, the YIT data was drawn from a sample of adolescents who were in the process of experiencing the effects of stepfathers. The NORC data was drawn from the sample of adults who reflected upon their family structure when they were about 16 years of age. Secondly, the YIT data was drawn solely from male respondents. The NORC data was drawn from both male and female respondents.

These authors considered the first difference between the NORC and YIT samples "to be a strength rather than a weakness." Wilson, et al. (1975), contended that "the NORC data thus allows the identification of the broad areas of the impact of experience in a stepfather-family; the YIT data provides opportunity for a deeper look at the contemporary processes of experience in a stepfather family" (Page 529). The findings from both sets of data were statistically merged to demonstrate that there were few differences between individuals raised in stepfather families and intact families.

In addition to the studies mentioned above, some stepfamily research is based on personal and clinical experience (e.g., Maddoz, 1975; Roosevelt & Lofas, 1976; Visher & Visher, 1979). Perkins and Kahan

(1979) provide a first step toward a clinically-oriented empirical comparison of natural father and stepfather family systems. Their general approach was to study natural families versus stepparent families with a systems model of Kantor and Lehr (1975) in which family systems are three subsystems that interact with each other as well as the outside world. These three are the family unit system, the interpersonal subsystem, and the personal subsystem. Stepparent families for this study were limited to families consisting of a natural mother, who had been divorced, her children and a stepfather, all living together in the same home. The children's ages ranged from 12 to 15 years. Twelve years was the minimum age for the adolescents tested because of the nature of the Family Concept Q-Sort. The Family Concept Q-Sort provides a measure of family adjustment and family satisfaction. This instrument defines the family concept as the collection of feelings, attitudes, and expectations one has about the family unit in which one lives. Fifteen years was the maximum age of adolescents that the authors tested to avoid excessive involvement in the adolescent identity crisis. Four instruments were used in this study: 1) the Family Concept Q-Sort; 2) a Semantic Differential; 3) a demographic questionnaire; and 4) an interaction/reaction questionnaire.

In their introduction, Perkins and Kahan (1979) reported that "societal expectations about families are that on the average they all function pretty much the same." However, the results of their study suggested that this was not so; they found that a stepfather family system cannot be the same as a natural parent family system. They differed

along several dimensions including psychological adjustment. The differences between families in terms of understanding their members are very important. Perkins and Kahan found stepchildren understood their stepfathers significantly less than natural children understood their fathers, according to the results of the Family Concept Q-Sort. Additional support for the lack of understanding between the stepfather and stepchild is provided by the results of the interaction-reaction questionnaire developed by Osgood, Suci & Tannenbaum (1957). In only four of the 20 stepfather families, did the child go to the stepfather with his personal difficulties for help or guidance; the corresponding figure for natural fathers was 15 of 20.

Oshman and Manosevitz (1976) studied the effect of stepfathers upon the psychosocial development of late adolescent males. Three groups were tested, subjects with stepfathers, subjects with no stepfather who had remained fatherless from the onset of father absence to the time of the study, and subjects with fathers. These authors used the Ego Identity Scale to measure psychological development. They found that males with stepfathers attained levels of psychosocial functioning equivalent to that of father present males. The results from the father-present versus father-absent comparison demonstrate that father absence negatively affects personality development.

The inconsistencies in the stepfamily research are apparent from the literature review. Methodology could account for some of these inconsistencies. Attitudes of stepfamilies have been studied by use of self-reports. People seldom think, feel, or do what they say they

think, feel, or do, in a standardized inventory or questionnaire (Nisbett & Wilson, 1977). So it is with stepparents, children, and other informants about their behavior. The self-report response set is not always reflected in real life. Also, some of the test instruments used are crude, as admitted by Oshman and Manosevitz (1976). Another reason for the inconsistencies in the stepfamily research is that considerable data comes from clinical and personal experience (Roosevelt & Lofus, 1976; Visher & Visher, 1979). More attention needs to be devoted to features of the family or households. Each stepfamily might possess a number of distinct variables within their particular family. For example, number of children brought to the remarriage, age of child at onset of father-absence, length of father-absence before the formation of the stepfamily might vary between families. Other considerations could be the age of child at the time of stepfamily formation and the length that stepfamily has been together. Remarriage can be even more confusing for the adolescent, who must start to break away from his parents, versus the child that has had a stepparent since he or she was an infant.

Also, the stepfamily research lacks longitudinal studies. We need to gather data over a time period that will permit reviewing of their outcome, throughout childhood and into adulthood and old age.

Father Absence

Because the stepfamilies in this study are being compared with father absent families, some of the known effects of father absence will be reviewed.

There is a considerable amount of evidence pointing to the importance of the father-son relationship in male development (Biller & Borstelmann, 1967). Also, the effects of father absence on children have been extensively documented in research and reviewed by Herzog and Sudia (1973). Several studies have suggested that father-absent males have greater difficulty forming peer relationships than father-present males (Lynn & Sawrey, 1959; Miller, 1961). Another frequent generalization about children in fatherless homes is that they are prone to juvenile delinquency. The reasoning behind this is that lack of a resident father is likely to impair a boy's self-concept, especially his concept of his own maleness, since on the one hand he lacks a male model within the family and on the other hand he is exposed to overdependence on excessive interaction with the remaining female parent (Miller, 1958). Bronfenbrenner (1961) found that there was a positive correlation between the amount of time boys spent with their non-custodial fathers and the amount of leadership and responsibility that the boys displayed in school.

Father-absent children may also have a father surrogate in the form of a relative, friend, or teacher. This person can have considerable influence on their development. There have been few studies about the effects of father surrogates. These studies have included small subsamples of father-absent children with older brothers or father substitutes in their experimental designs (e.g. Santrock, 1972).

The Present Research

For this study three groups were used: father present, father absent, and stepfather families. The reason for using these three groups was to determine if there was a significant difference in the adolescent's self-esteem level with the father present, or a stepfather, or no father (father absence).

The first hypothesis is that in the father present or intact family, adolescent males will have significantly higher self-esteem levels than in stepfather families and that adolescent males in the father absence group will be significantly lower in self-esteem levels than either the stepfather group or the natural father group. Previous studies (Fast & Cain 1966, and Bowerman & Irish 1962) have shown significant differences between children's assessments of the functions of natural-father families and stepfather families with stepfather families being assessed more negatively. Family functioning may affect the self-esteem of family members. Furthermore, when all three family types were used as for Oshman and Manosevitz (1976), lower levels of psychological development were found in subjects from father-absent families than in subjects from father-present families, as measured by the Ego Identity Scale.

Thus, these differences are hypothesized because in the father absence literature, the absence of a father or surrogate father has been related to detrimental effects on the family functioning and adolescent male's personality development.

The second hypothesis was that in all three groups, with age, there would be an increase in difficulty dealing with parental authority. This is to include natural parents and stepparents.

As teenagers attempt to resolve crucial tasks leading them toward adulthood, adolescence is a trying time in development. To establish themselves as independent adults, teenagers must achieve sexual maturity, separate themselves from the family, and find their own identity. Adolescent struggles for independence are characterized by maddening behavior--mood swings, rebellion, brooding, disobedience (Einstein, 1985). Teenagers look forward to leaving home yet fear it. All these are natural ingredients of adolescence. Clashes with teenagers are common in all families.

The third hypothesis was that adolescent males from father-absent households would report spending more of their time at home than adolescent males from blended families and adolescent males from intact families, while the fourth hypothesis was that adolescent males from father-absent households would devote more time to household chores than sons from intact families.

The rationale for these hypotheses is when parents separate, the children are generally required to assume new responsibilities and obligations (Gardner, 1976). Adolescents in father-absent households have noted changes in roles and responsibilities. If a single parent (mother only) is working full-time and, especially if the parent has more than one child to care for, then the parent is likely to find that sharing

responsibility with the children is very nearly necessary to maintain the functioning of the household (Weiss, 1979).

The difference between a single-parent household and a two-parent household is not simply that children are asked to do more household tasks, but they are responsible for the chores and the continued functioning of the household. In the single-parent household the child has a partnership with the parent. Adolescents in single-parent households often have no option; they must participate in their households as full members, with rights and responsibilities (Weiss, 1979). The presence of a stepfather may reduce the need for adolescent children's involvement in running the household, and thus it is hypothesized that adolescents from stepfamilies will more closely resemble adolescents from intact families in this regard.

The fifth hypothesis is that punishment will be equally stressful for adolescent males in intact families and stepparent families. Punishment or discipline may be particularly stressful for adolescents regardless of the type of family that they are in because adolescence is a time for testing and rebelling. Previous authors (e.g., Lutz, 1983; Einstein, 1985) have found the stepparent family contributes to higher stress levels where discipline is concerned. Adolescents often do not respond positively to rules to begin with and may find it more difficult to accept rules from an "outsider" such as a stepparent. However, it is not known if the issues surrounding discipline are strictly stepfamily issues. Discipline can be a particularly stressful area for all adolescents because they are naturally seeking autonomy at this time in their

development. When a remarriage takes place and there are teenage children, parents and stepparents may misinterpret typical teenage behavior as a reaction to (an expression of belonging) to the stepfamily, rather than merely as the product of the developmental stage of the adolescent.

Several social psychologists have studied the process of misinterpretation or misattribution. For example, misattribution models of hunger and eating (Schachter & Rodin, 1974), smoking (Schachter, 1977), crowding (Worchel & Teddlie, 1976), phobias (Nisbett & Valins, 1971) and many other emotions or internal states have been formulated. Each model assumes that the individual becomes aroused for one reason or another. The arousal is then attributed to whatever salient stimulus provides a good explanation or label for it. For the present study, adolescent males were asked if they found it difficult accepting punishment from a parent or stepparent to find out if presumed age-related difficulties in accepting punishment varied as a function of family type. The stepfamily might be another model for the misattribution theory. Parents, stepparents and stepchildren, when clashing over discipline or punishment, might misattribute its cause to the stepfamily, when perhaps the cause could be attributed to teenage-parental discipline problems that occur within all family types.

Summary

The purpose of this study is to determine whether there are any differences between the three groups of male adolescents living in 1) natural parent families; 2) stepfather families; 3) single parent,

father-absent/mother-only families. If there are differences in the male adolescents' self-esteem level, can these differences be attributed to developmental age-related differences, or specific family differences or to an interaction between age and family factors?

As mentioned previously, to study the stepfamily exhaustively would involve taking into consideration a number of variables. For the present study, however, it was not possible to individually interview the students or their parents or stepparents. Information pertaining to the number of children brought to the remarriage was outside the focus of the present study on adolescent self-esteem. Also, a longitudinal study of stepfamilies would be beneficial by collecting data over a time period and examining their long-term effects, but could not be done in the time allowed for a master's thesis.

As stepfamilies proliferate in our society, the need to understand this family unit becomes apparent. Additional data on the effects of stepfathers is needed and especially older families with adolescents.

CHAPTER II METHOD

Subjects

A total of 217 male junior high school students participated in the present study. Grade levels included 6th, 7th and 8th grades and testing was conducted at a Des Moines, Iowa, junior high school. Des Moines, Iowa, is a medium sized midwestern city with a population of 250,000.

There were 23 eleven year olds, 60 twelve year olds, 71 thirteen year olds and 63 fourteen year olds. Of these students, 121 were from intact families, 37 were from stepfather families and 59 were from families that had experienced father loss through death or divorce and the mother had not remarried.

It should be noted that of the male respondents, only eight respondents reported living in a stepfamily situation less than two years, with the remainder reporting living in stepfamily 3-4 years (7 respondents); 5-6 years (7 respondents); 7-8 years (4 respondents); 9 or more years (7 respondents). Four of the respondents did not answer this question. Of the father-absent group or mother-only family, 39 of the 59 males adolescents reported living nine or more years in this family type, with only five respondents who reported living with "mother-only" for less than two years.

Materials

The main dependent measure used in this study was the Piers-Harris Self-Concept test consisting of the eighty "yes" or "no" statements used to identify student's specific feelings about themselves.

The seven cluster areas are: Behavior: How the student view his/her behavior (18 items); Intellectual and School Status: How the student perceives his/her intellectual ability and school status (18 items); Physical Appearance and Attributes: How the student view his/her appearance and physical ability (12 items); Anxiety: This subscale attempts to identify the degree of anxiety an individual has (12 items); Popularity: Identifies how popular the individual believes himself/herself to be with others (12 items); Happiness and Satisfaction: How happy or satisfied the respondent is with himself/herself (9 items); General: This is the remainder of items. They do not appear in any of the above clusters. They are not a cluster by themselves (13 items). For all seven cluster areas, the higher the score, the closer the student responded to the desired answers. The higher the score, the more positive is the measured attribute.

The second set of dependent measures came from a general activity questionnaire (Appendix I). Again, no names or student numbers were used on either test. In the general questionnaire, students were first asked their sex and age. The next ten questions asked students "with whom did they spend their free time and how much time was spent with friends, father, mother, stepfather, etc." The main purpose of these questions was to see if adolescents would show any significantly different use of free time as a function of family type. The next six questions asked students about the kind of activities they participated in and how frequently. This particular set of questions was included to determine if adolescents would show any significant difference in

participation in activities as a function of family type. The questionnaire also asked students who punished them how often, and how they were punished. They were asked if they found it difficult accepting punishment from a parent and, if they had a stepparent, did they find it difficult accepting punishment from them. The purpose of this set of questions was to determine if the type of family--intact, stepfamily, or mother-only family--would show any significant effect on how the adolescent accepted punishment. The last set of questions from the activity questionnaire asked the students about the adults that they lived with and, if they were in a stepfamily or single parent family, how many years had they been living in one.

Procedure

Each student was asked to respond to the Piers-Harris Self-Concept Test. Afterwards, each student was administered the general activity questionnaire described above. Teachers administered the test and questionnaire during class time, allowing the students 50 minutes to complete the two questionnaires. Questionnaires and the Piers-Harris Self-Concept Tests were numbered so that testing was anonymous. Test scores were matched with questionnaires in order to identify family types; for example, natural parent families, stepfather families and father-absent families.

CHAPTER III RESULTS

An analysis of variance for unequal sample sizes revealed no significant difference between groups of adolescent males in self-esteem as a function of whether they were from intact, mother-only, or stepfather families. All reported levels of significance are based on two-tailed tests. All response scales were converted to equal intervals for purposes of analysis.

However, on three subscales of the Piers-Harris Self-Concept Scale, there was a similar developmental difference. Self-esteem scores were lowest in 13-year olds with higher scores shown by 12 and 14-year olds and still higher self-esteem levels in the 11-year olds. Subscale 2 (Intellectual--school) $F(3,205) = 4.024$, $p < .01$, Subscale 3 (Physical Appearance) $F(3,205) = 3.689$, $p < .01$ and Subscale 6 (Happiness) $F(3,205) = 3.710$, $p < .01$ showed a significant developmental difference (Table 1 and Figure 1). There were no significant differences in self-esteem as a function of family type.

The Activity Questionnaire data revealed a significant effect of age in Items 5 (time spent with mother) $F(3,28) = 4.244$, $p < .05$. Not surprisingly, this age effect shows the younger males report spending more time with their mothers. Two other items showed significant effects of age. The first item was Item 12 (time spent with friends) $F(3,34) = 3.091$, $p < .05$ (Figure 2). As expected, the age effect shows older adolescents spending more time with their peer group. The second item was Item 20 (In your family, who punishes you?) (mother), $F(3,75) = 2.938$, $p < .05$ (Figure 3). The age related differences show

"mother punishing" more frequently the 13- and 14-year olds. There were no other significant age effects.

There were significant effects of family type on Item 17 (youth clubs), $F(2,205) = 4.221$, $p < .05$, (Figure 4) and Item 18 (school extra-curricular activities), $F(2,205) = 4.134$, $p < .05$ (Figure 5). In both activities, youth clubs and school extra-curricular activities, adolescent males from mother-only families reported more involvement than adolescent males in stepfamilies or intact families. There were no other significant effects of family type on these items (Table 2).

Chi-squares were computed on Items 30-39. There was a significant effect of family type on Item 30 (best friends met mother) $\chi^2 = 6.956$, $p < .05$ with the stepfamily group reporting less frequently that their best friends had met their mothers. When a Chi-square was done on those children who lived in a stepfamily, a significant age effect was found on Item 32, (best friends met stepfather) $\chi^2 = 14.010$ $p < .01$. The significance of this effect is attributable to the unequal distribution of yes responses across age levels among the small number of boys in stepfamilies. For example, none of the four 11-year olds reported that their best friends had met their stepfather, while about 73% of the 24 12-, 13-and 14-year olds reported that their best friends had met their stepfather. Since the significance of this result appears to be an artifact of the small number of stepfamily boys at each age level, this finding will not be discussed further.

CHAPTER IV DISCUSSION

The major result in this study was that there were few significant differences in self-esteem of early adolescent boys as a function of family type. Another finding was a developmental difference on three sub-scales of the Piers-Harris Self-Concept Scale, with lowest self-esteem scores in 13 year olds. Results from the Activity Questionnaire revealed the younger males reported spending more time at home with mother, and the older adolescents reported spending more time with friends. The 13-and 14-year olds reported "mother punishing" more frequently than did the 11-and 12-year olds. Family type differences were found between the father-absent (mother-only) family and the other family types in that adolescents in father-absent families reported more involvement in school extra-curricular activities and youth clubs. The other family type difference was that adolescents in stepfather families reported less frequently that their best friends had met their mothers. In general, the results of this study suggest a somewhat more positive picture than previous studies concerning the effects of stepfathers (Perkins & Kahn, 1979; Fast & Cain, 1966; Bowerman & Irish, 1962; Young & Parish, 1977; Parish & Taylor, 1979).

Turning to the hypotheses mentioned in the introduction, it was hypothesized that in the father present or intact family, adolescent males will have significantly higher self-esteem levels than in stepfather families and that adolescent males in the father absence group will be significantly lower in self-esteem levels than either the stepfather group or the natural father group.

The male adolescents who participated in the study did not demonstrate differences in self-esteem as a function of the type of family in which they were living. However, these adolescents showed significant age-related differences on three sub-scales of the Piers-Harris Self-Concept Test in areas of Intellectual-School, Physical Appearance, and Happiness. There were declining scores across age levels from 11 to 13, with 14-to 15-year olds showing somewhat higher self-esteem levels. This could be an indication of a developmental trend. The significance of the age comparison found in the Piers-Harris sub-scales, Intellectual, Physical Appearance, and Happiness suggests that the teenager is truly more affected by the developmental stage of adolescence than the type of family in which they live.

Previous researchers have emphasized the extent to which self-concept during adolescence may be influenced by fluctuations or consistencies in the larger social context. Baltes and Nesselroade (1972) and Newman (1972-1973) emphasized the importance of identifying changes in the social milieu that may influence patterns of personality change during adolescence. In a sample of almost 2,000 school children aged 8 to 17, an increased disturbance in the self-image was found to occur primarily during the 12th year, between the 12th and 13th birthday (Simmons, Rosenberg & Rosenberg, 1973). This disturbance was demonstrated by greater self-consciousness, greater instability of self-concept, lower self-esteem, and more negative estimates of how others view them. These results seem consistent with those of the present study, in which the 11-to 13-year old males showed lower scores in the Intellectual, Physical Appearance, and Happiness scales.

Another potential contributing factor is that for the adolescent girl, the onset of puberty occurs at approximately 11 years of age. This is almost two years sooner than the parallel experience for boys. At the 13-year age level, most of the girls have completed pubescent changes, whereas most of the boys haven't, which might lead to self-esteem problems among boys. The changes that are brought about during puberty have an impact on the adolescents' self-image (Kagan & Coles, 1972).

Another purpose of this study was to examine the effects of parental authority. In all three family types it was hypothesized that with age, there would be an increase in difficulty dealing with parental authority. In this study, the average male respondent reported accepting punishment as "somewhat easy" to "neither difficult nor easy". Again, no significant differences were found as a function of family type. The only developmental difference was that older adolescent males in the sample reported that their mother punished them more frequently than the younger males in the sample did. As the adolescent male cuts the emotional cords of childhood and launches out as a person in his own right, we might expect to find an increased perception of discipline and this would explain this developmental difference. Also, the older adolescent male is spending more time with his friends. Often what the group wants to do is not in agreement with the rules at home. Mothers may be the most important enforcers of parental rules, given their primary role in child rearing, thus the older adolescent male reports more discipline from his mother.

Also, in this study it was hypothesized that adolescent males from father-absent households would report spending more of their time at home than adolescent males from stepfamilies and intact families, and that adolescent males from father-absent households would devote more time to household chores than sons from intact families. However, no significant differences on these variables were found as a function of type of family. It appears that the adolescent males in this study are not affected by their family type in these activities.

Lastly, it was hypothesized that punishment would be equally stressful for adolescent males in intact families and stepparent families. The average response of the adolescent males in this study reported punishment as "neither difficult nor easy" in both intact families and stepparent families. Again, the data suggests that this family unit is functioning much the same in this area as the intact family.

The results of the present study showed some differences from the results obtained by other authors (Parrish & Taylor, 1979; Young & Parish, 1977), in that their respondents from stepfamilies reported lower self-concepts than those from intact families. There were no significant differences in self-esteem scores regardless of family in the present study. What might account for these differences in results is the increasing number of children found in stepfamilies and father-absent families. Again, we can consider the influence of the peer group. Ten or fifteen years ago, a teenager from a broken home was not as common as today. With the increasing number of children found in

stepfamilies and father-absent families, adolescents today find many of their peers in the same family situation. In other words, divorce and remarriage is something that many of their peers have experienced. If we also consider the adolescents in intact families, we should realize that many of their friends are in stepfamilies and father-absent families. Increased contact with peers from different family types may reduce negative stereotypes about "broken homes."

Other results in this study reveal younger males spending more time with mother at home and older adolescents spending more time with their peers. Family type, whether intact, stepfather, or mother-only, does not appear to have an effect on these items. The peer group serves many functions for adolescents. Goodman (1969) has suggested that the peer group serves as a transitional world between dependency and autonomy. These findings suggest that the developmental process of disengaging the family is occurring in all three groups.

An interesting finding was that adolescents from "mother-only" families reported more involvement in youth clubs and school extra-curricular activities. Possibly the children from these "father-absent" families were encouraged by their mothers to join these activities. Most mothers in this type of family have to work outside the home, and the main problem besetting these families seem to be financial problems (Coletta, 1979). School extra-curricular activities would provide entertainment at minimal cost. Also the adolescents themselves might prefer to be in these clubs as an outlet or expression of belonging to a group that is under the direction of an adult.

It should be noted that we have to be conservative in interpreting these results. Because of the number of different tests of significance that were conducted, some of the findings could be significant by chance alone.

Some authors extol the beneficial effects of the presence of a stepfather or father surrogate on the development of children, particularly male children. Oshman and Manosevitz (1976) found male college students, both those who had stepfathers and those who had never experienced father-absence did not differ from each other on measures of psychosocial functioning. But both groups scored higher than subjects from father-absent families in which no father surrogate was present. In the present study, no significant differences between family types was found. The father-absent adolescents showed no difference in self-esteem from adolescents from other family types, unlike Oshman and Manosevit's respondents. Again, finding no difference in family type could suggest increasing societal acceptance of the father-absent family.

It's worthy to note that the length of time that these adolescents have been in a stepfamily or mother-only family could definitely contribute to the findings in this study. Jessie Bernard (1972) asserts that very young and very old (adult) offspring suffer fewer negative effects from the assimilation of a stepparent into the family unit than do adolescents. In the present study, only eight adolescents have lived in a stepfamily less than two years.

Whether stepparenting generally and stepfathering specifically have positive or negative effects on children in reconstituted families is a question that can be resolved only when variables such as age of child at time of reconstitution, length of time spent in a mother-only family, income, and other factors are controlled. Some of the negative connotations attributed to stepparents may be the effect of sociocultural conditioning (Jenkins, 1978). Stepfamilies have been culturally disadvantaged families. In all societies, tales of wicked stepmothers are a part of the literary heritage, while at intervals a cruel stepfather appears in the literature (Visher and Visher, 1979). The terms describing steprelationships may accurately reflect attitudes towards those relationships and explain why social science literature and research has neglected the stepfather and his stepchild (Bowerman & Irish, 1962; Leslie, 1973). Cultural and religious inhibitions against divorce and the remarriage of widows are diminishing but still do exist in some situations (Bernard, 1956; Smith, 1953; Blaine, 1963; Pospishil, 1967).

Caution must prevail when interpreting the results of this study, especially pertaining to the null hypothesis. Greenwald (1975) has explicitly outlined the consequences of accepting the null hypothesis. For the present research, the "no differences" finding does not mean the null hypothesis is supported, just not rejected. In this particular study, explanations for the lack of significant differences could be the small sample size, and possibly the insensitivity of the dependent measure. In order to accept the null hypothesis, this study would have to be replicated with larger sample groups. However, the lack of

significant differences between family types in this study could suggest that the stigma associated with divorce and remarriage is not as strong as ten years ago. Furstenberg and Spanier (1984) have cited many possible explanations for the growing acceptability of divorce and remarriage (Ross & Sawhill, 1975; Masnick & Bane, 1980; Cherlin, 1981; Lasch, 1977).

- "1. The movement of women into the labor force combined with the declining significance of childbearing and childbearing as an exclusive role for married women;
- "2. The growth of the welfare state and the provision of economic alternatives to marital dependency;
- "3. The lowering of legal and social barriers that previously had served to constrain couples from ending an unwelcoming marriage; and
- "4. The increasing emphasis in American culture on personal fulfillment which may have elevated our expectations of marriage."

Divorce has become an intrinsic part of a cultural system that values individual discretion and emotional gratification. Remarriage is not a new phenomenon but its instance has now become commonplace. This is a direct result of our high divorce rate (Glick, 1979). The adolescents from the present study were born in the seventies, and 40 to 50 percent of those marriages ended in divorce (Visher & Visher, 1979; Furstenberg & Spanier, 1984). The length of time these adolescents have lived in stepfamilies could explain finding no significant differences in self-esteem scores from their cohorts in intact families and mother-only families. Thirty-nine of the 59 respondents from mother-only families reported that they had lived nine or more years in the mother-only family. We might consider that these adolescents, whether in a

single parent (mother-only) family or a stepfather family, are living in a stable family. Teens accentuate whatever troubles their parents have, and it is better to be in a stable, single-parent family than living in a turbulent two-parent family. Landis (1968) wrote that the unhappy marriage is more psychologically disturbing to children than divorce.

In conclusion, we find there are a number of factors that could be contributing to the differences in results from this study and previous research.

As was presented earlier in this paper, research conducted 10 to 20 years ago on remarriage and stepfamilies did not have positive outcomes for the stepfamily (Fast & Cain, 1966; Bowerman & Irish, 1962; Smith, 1953), but instead carried the negative connotation of high marital risk and inevitable failure.

Another factor could be that previous studies found their samples in a clinical setting, such as mental health facilities and child guidance centers (Visher & Visher, 1979; Fast & Cain, 1966). Again, these studies focused on the ill effects of divorce and remarriage. Not surprisingly, they were more likely to find such ill effects than researchers who studied community-based samples.

On the positive side, in an analysis of two national surveys about stepfathers and stepchildren (Wilson et al, 1975), researchers merged the data and found no substantial differences. In looking at social and psychological characteristics that ranged from religion, politics, crime and delinquency to general interpersonal relationships, personal evaluation, and relationships concerning marriage and the

family, they found the experience of living in a stepfamily can be positive, negative or mixed--just as in the intact biological family.

For further research, it would be suggested to study the effects of extra-parental figures and how they provide additional models for stepchildren giving them another way of trying on life and viewing the world.

Finally, it would be of interest to study children in these three family types prospectively and test the development of children through adolescence and adulthood.

The results of this study could also be limited because of the type in instruments used in testing. Both instruments relied on self-reports, and were administered only to adolescents. Another limitation is that it was not possible to interview these adolescents. It also would have been beneficial to interview both them and their parents and stepparents. As with any family research, all family members need to be taken into account. The differences in stepfamilies themselves could merit attention, for example, the stepfather could have children of his own in the marriage, and this could affect his relationship with his stepchild.

Also, some important factors not explored in this study may greatly moderate differences between family types. Additional questions would be beneficial to examine such variables as (1) do both parents (or parent and stepparent) work?; (2) how much support does the family receive from extended family?; (3) what is the current child custody arrangement?; (4) how much responsibility does the ex-spouse take in raising the children (in father-absent and stepfamilies)?

TABLE I

Scores on the Piers-Harris Self-Concept Test
Scale Across Age Groups

		11 years	12 years	13 years	14-15 years
Scale 1 (Behavior)	<u>M</u>	54.4348	51.7000	47.5211	48.4444
	<u>SD</u>	8.6172	8.8496	10.2802	9.4797
Scale 2* (Intellectual and School)	<u>M</u>	56.2609	52.3667	49.2254	50.0159
	<u>SD</u>	7.7707	9.2479	10.2973	9.8938
Scale 3* (Physical Appearance)	<u>M</u>	59.2609	52.2833	49.4366	52.4127
	<u>SD</u>	7.8231	10.3973	11.0825	11.3559
Scale 4 (Anxiety)	<u>M</u>	55.8696	57.0667	53.4366	55.8254
	<u>SD</u>	9.0870	9.3389	11.0825	9.0528
Scale 5 (Popularity)	<u>M</u>	49.7826	48.9167	50.6620	51.9048
	<u>SD</u>	10.2068	10.3814	9.5468	9.6965
Scale 6* (Happiness and Satisfaction)	<u>M</u>	57.6957	53.7000	50.0423	54.0635
	<u>SD</u>	5.9957	8.1330	11.2026	9.1895
Total Score	<u>M</u>	59.5652	55.6167	52.3944	54.0317
	<u>SD</u>	8.0047	8.6477	9.0593	8.3298

*Age Difference $p < .05$

TABLE II

Scores on the Piers-Harris Self-Concept Test
Scale As A Function of Family Type

		Intact Family Male & Female	Male and Stepfamily	Mother Only
Scale 1 (Behavior)	$\frac{M}{SD}$	50.2149 8.8461	48.0000 11.0050	49.6271 10.6072
Scale 2 (Intellectual and School)	$\frac{M}{SD}$	52.0744 9.2088	48.8378 11.9873	50.4068 9.4834
Scale 3 (Physical Appearance)	$\frac{M}{SD}$	51.9917 11.1971	50.4324 12.7879	53.3898 10.6626
Scale 4 (Anxiety)	$\frac{M}{SD}$	56.0661 9.2112	51.2432 12.3433	56.6102 8.9559
Scale 5 (Popularity)	$\frac{M}{SD}$	50.2231 9.7352	48.5946 11.0087	52.0678 9.3989
Scale 6 (Happiness and Satisfaction)	$\frac{M}{SD}$	53.9587 9.0502	49.8378 10.5975	53.1356 9.8163
Total Score	$\frac{M}{SD}$	54.9091 8.1915	51.8378 10.8385	55.4068 8.5604

FIGURE 1

Piers-Harris Sub-Scales which showed a significant difference as a function of age.

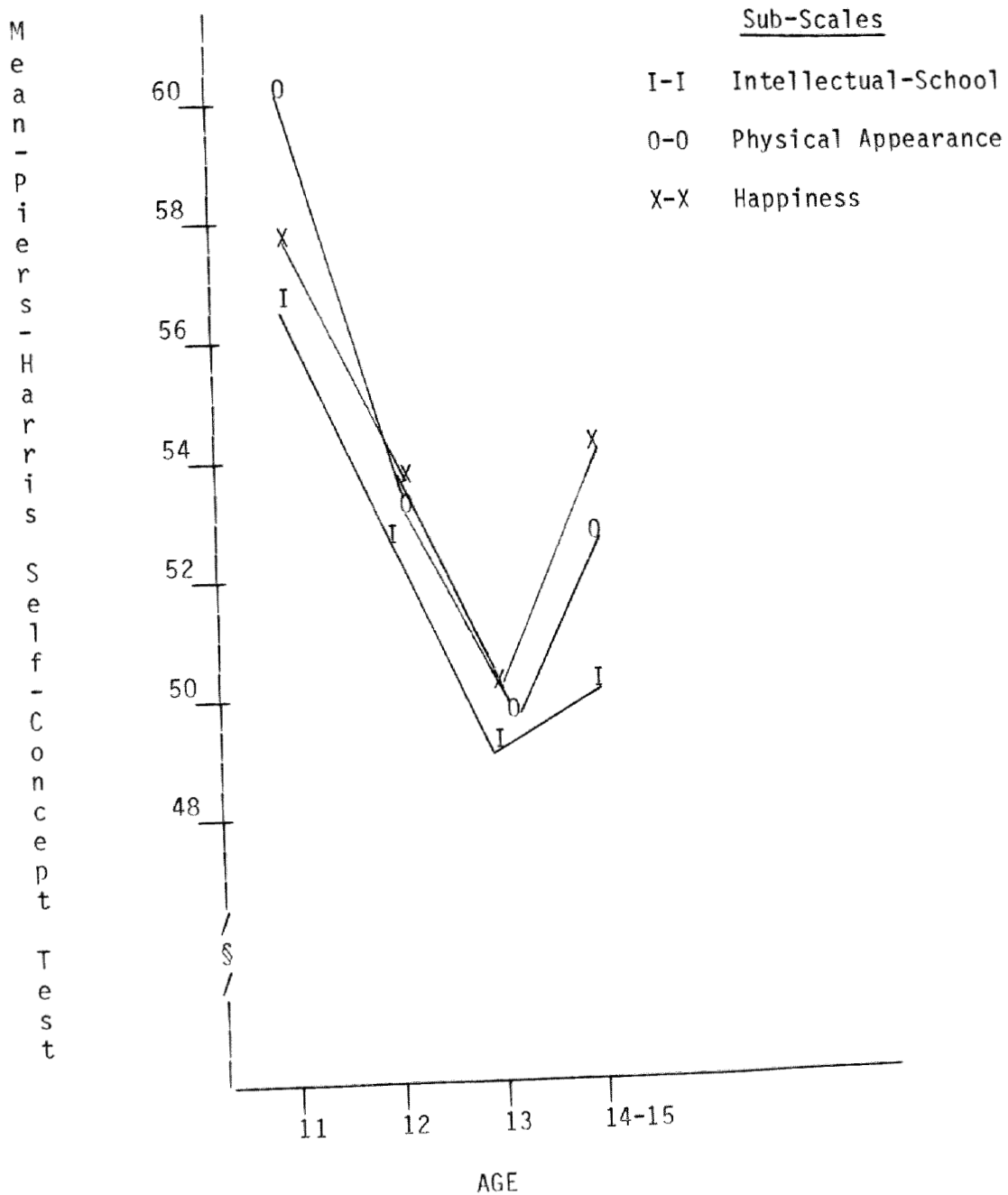


FIGURE 2

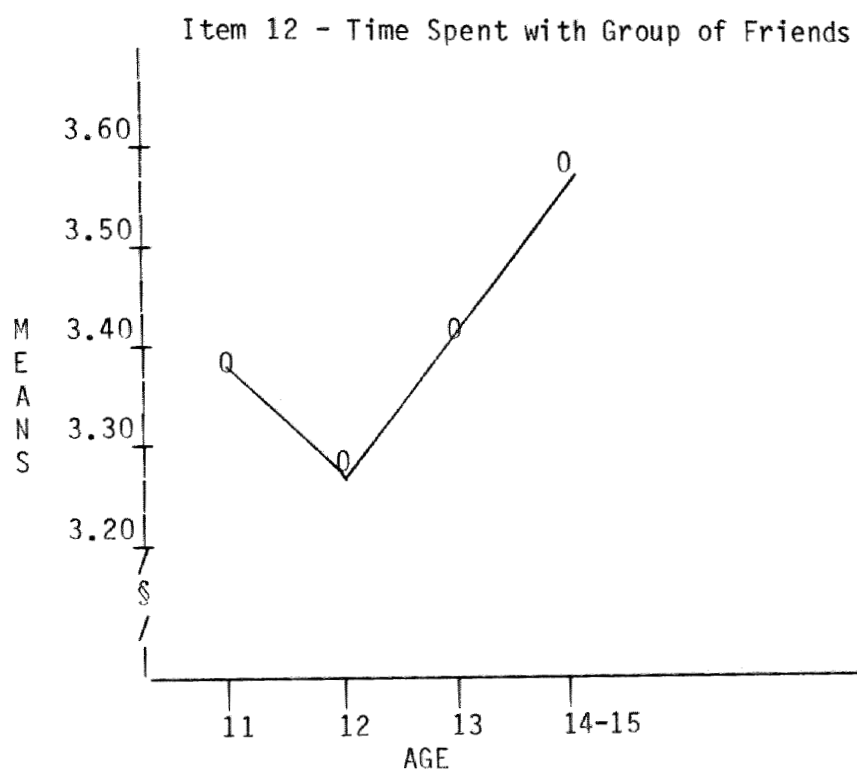


FIGURE 3

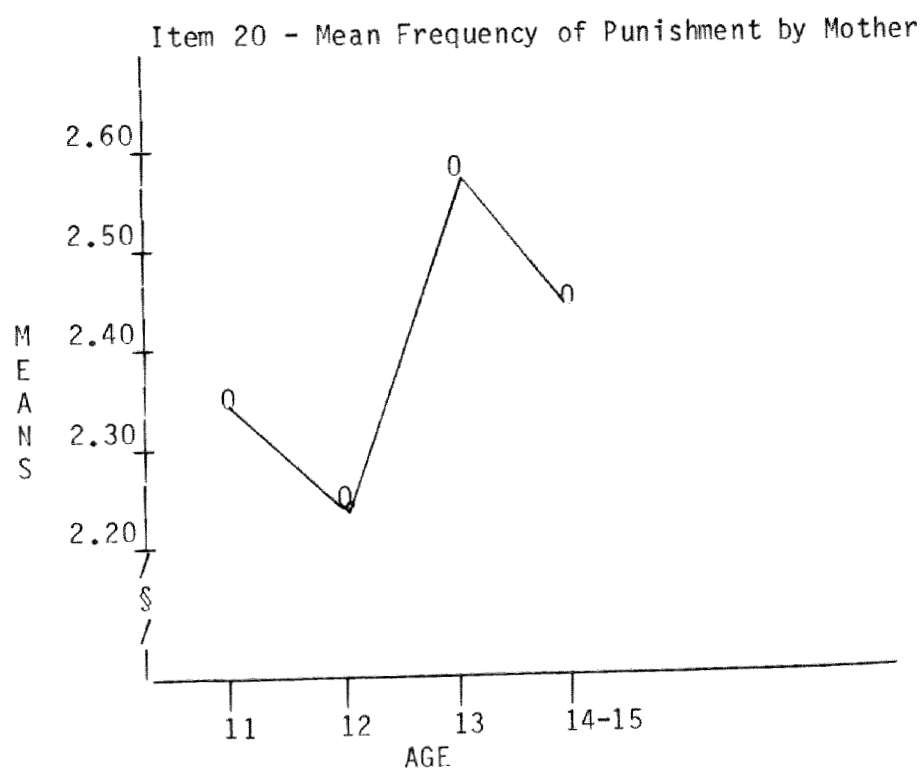
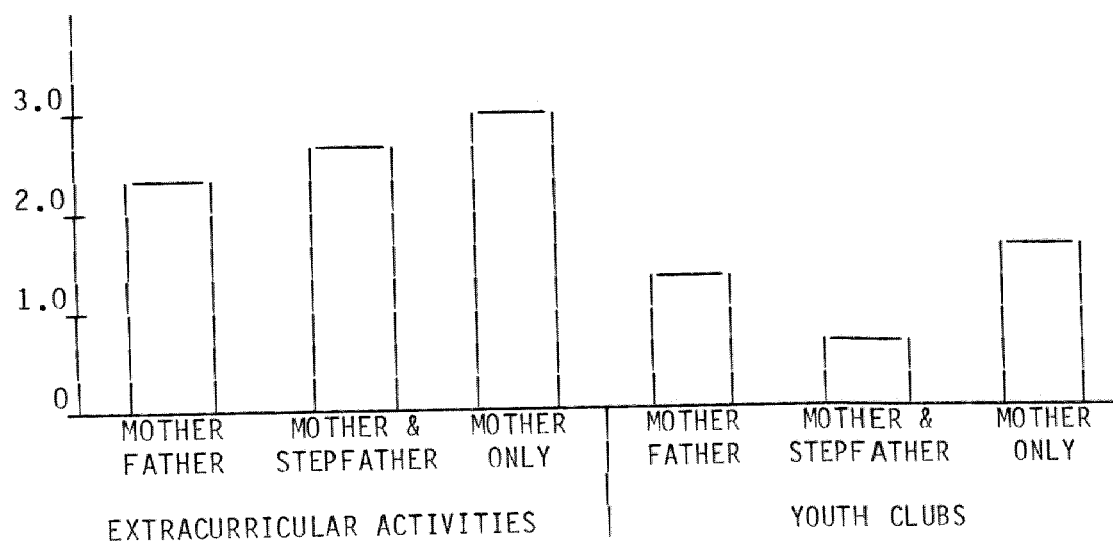


FIGURE 4

Family Types Participation in Activities



APPENDIX I

Activities Questionnaire

We need a few minutes of your time to answer these questions about your activities and how you feel about yourself. This questionnaire will be used to help understand other students your age.

There is no way to identify your answers with your name. You need not be concerned that anyone will know how you have answered the questions.

DO NOT SIGN YOUR NAME to the questionnaire.

Answer all questions as thoughtfully and as honestly as you can. There are no right or wrong answers.

Thank you for your help.

Please circle the item which best describes you at this time.

1. Are you: Male Female
2. How old were you on your last birthday?

11 yrs. 12 yrs. 13 yrs. 14 yrs. 15 yrs.

With whom do you usually spend your free time? Think about the last week. How many hours each school day did you spend. . . .
(Circle ONE answer on each line if it applies to your family)

- | | | | | | |
|-----|---------|--------|--------|--------|---|
| 3. | 0-1 hr. | 2 hrs. | 3 hrs. | 4 hrs. | 5 hrs. or more |
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| | | | | | By myself (and not asleep) |
| 4. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| | | | | | With my father |
| 5. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| | | | | | With my mother |
| 6. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| | | | | | With my stepfather (if you have one) |
| 7. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| | | | | | With my stepmother (if you have one) |
| 8. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| | | | | | With my foster parents or guardians |
| 9. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| | | | | | With my brothers or sisters or stepbrothers or step-sisters |
| 10. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| | | | | | With other adults in my household who aren't related to me |
| 11. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| | | | | | With a boyfriend or girlfriend |
| 12. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| | | | | | With a group of friends |

In the last month, how often have you participated in the following types of activities? (Circle ONE answer for each statement)
How often in the last month did you. . .

- | | Never | 1 or 2 Times | 3 Times | 4 Times | 5 Times | 6 or more Times |
|-----|-------|--------------|---------|---------|---------|---|
| 13. | 0 | 1 | 3 | | | 6 |
| | | | | | | play individual or team sports like basketball, tennis, football |
| 14. | 0 | 1 | 3 | | | 6 |
| | | | | | | Do outdoor activities like fishing, hiking or biking |
| 15. | 0 | 1 | 3 | | | 6 |
| | | | | | | Work on a hobby, collection, or art project |
| 16. | 0 | 1 | 3 | | | 6 |
| | | | | | | participate in church activities like church services, Sunday school, or youth groups |
| 17. | 0 | 1 | 3 | | | 6 |
| | | | | | | participate in youth clubs like 4-H, Scouting, or YMCA |
| 18. | 0 | 1 | 3 | | | 6 |
| | | | | | | participate in extracurricular activities in school |

In your family, who punishes you? (Circle one number on each line)

	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always	Doesn't Apply to my Family	
19.	1	2	3	4	5	father
20.	1	2	3	4	5	mother
21.	1	2	3	4	5	stepfather
22.	1	2	3	4	5	stepmother
23.	1	2	3	4	5	mother's boyfriend
24.	1	2	3	4	5	father's girlfriend
25.	1	2	3	4	5	guardian/foster parent
26.	1	2	3	4	5	other relatives

27. Think about last week. How many hours each school day did you work around the house on household jobs? (Circle one number)

0-1 hr. 2 hrs. 3 hrs. 4 hrs. 5 hrs.
1 2 3 4 5

28. Think about last week. How much time each school day did you spend at home, not including asleep time? (Circle one number)

0-2 hrs. 3-4 hrs. 5-6 hrs. 7-8 hrs. 9-10 hrs.
1 2 3 4 5

29. Think about last week. How much time each school day did you spend at work away from home? (Circle one number)

0-2 hrs. 3-4 hrs. 5-6 hrs. 7-8 hrs. 9-10 hrs.
1 2 3 4 5

Circle yes or no.

30. yes no Have your best friends met your mother?
31. yes no Have your best friends met your father?
32. yes no If you have a stepparent, have your best friends met him/her?
33. yes no If you have a guardian, have your best friends met him/her?
34. yes no Do you like to do things with your friends at your house?

How are you punished? (Circle yes or no)

35. yes no Verbal punishment (getting yelled at)
36. yes no Physical punishment
37. yes no Having privileges taken away
38. yes no Grounded
39. yes no Extra work at home

40. Do you find it difficult accepting punishment from a parent? (Circle one number)

very somewhat neither difficult somewhat very
easy easy nor easy difficult difficult
1 2 3 4 5

41. If you have a stepparent, do you find it difficult accepting punishment from them? (Circle one number)

very	somewhat	neither	somewhat	very
easy	easy	nor easy	difficult	difficult
1	2	3	4	5

42. Who are the adults that you live with? (Circle ONE number)

1 mother and father	6 father only
2 father and stepmother	7 mother only
3 father and girlfriend	8 grandparents or other
4 mother and stepfather	relatives
5 mother and boyfriend	9 foster parents or guardians

Think about the adults that you live with. Answer the following questions if they apply to you.

43. If you are living with your father and stepmother, how long have you been living with them? (Circle one answer)
 0-2 yrs. 3-4 yrs. 5-6 yrs. 7-8 yrs. 9+ yrs.
44. If you are living with your mother and stepfather, how long have you been living with them? (Circle one answer)
 0-2 yrs. 3-4 yrs. 5-6 yrs. 7-8 yrs. 9+ yrs.
45. If you are living with your mother only, how long have you been living with her only? (Circle one answer)
 0-2 yrs. 3-4 yrs. 5-6 yrs. 7-8 yrs. 9+ yrs.
46. If you are living with your father only, how long have you been living with him only? (Circle one answer)
 0-2 yrs. 3-4 yrs. 5-6 yrs. 7-8 yrs. 9+ yrs.

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